

EXHIBIT 19

Rivas changes story, admits escapees had help

He says inmate used coded note to arrange for vehicle on outside

By Selwyn Crawford

Staff Writer

The avowed leader of the seven recently captured prison escapees changed his story Saturday and said the inmates did have outside help in making their escape.

In a telephone interview from the Teller County Jail in Divide, Colo., with WFAA-TV (Channel 8), the inmate, George Rivas, said arrangements for a vehicle to be used after they left the prison were made by one of the other escapees, whom he declined to name.

"I don't want to implicate my friend," Mr. Rivas said. "He has his own story to tell. But he did have the vehicle there."

Authorities have said the inmates had help from the outside in escaping and avoiding authorities, but Mr. Rivas had denied in an interview Friday that anyone besides the inmates was involved.

Mr. Rivas said Saturday that all he knew about the outside arrangement for the vehicle was that the other escapee used coded jail letters to plan it, disguising the discussion while talking "about a birthday gift or something."

The prisoners used a state-owned van to drive out of the Conally Unit near Kenedy, Texas, on Dec. 13. They then drove to a nearby Wal-Mart, where a vehicle was waiting.

Authorities say they plan to arrest at least one outside collaborator in the case, but no arrests had been by Saturday night.



George Rivas

Also Saturday, Mr. Rivas reiterated that he shot Irving police Officer Aubrey Hawkins after the escapees robbed an Irving sporting goods store on Christmas Eve.

But he said that he did so only after he thought Officer Hawkins shot him. He said he later learned that he had been wounded by one of his fellow escapees.

Asked whether he killed the officer, Mr. Rivas said that he thinks he did but that "I didn't intend to."

"He was cooperating," Mr. Rivas said. "What I was going to do ... was open the door [of the officer's police cruiser] and put his handcuffs on him and get the heck out of there."

But Mr. Rivas said that when he was shot, he started firing at Officer Hawkins.

He said that he thinks he deserves a death sentence and that he hopes his execution will bring some solace to the slain officer's family.

Reason for confessing

"No amount of apology could make up for what I done," Mr. Rivas said. "Except that I hope by me confessing this ... I can give them some kind of closure when my life is taken."

Mr. Rivas also said Saturday that he planned the escape alone and that it took him less than a month to do so.

He said the inmates waited until the winter to attempt the escape because he thought prison staffing would be reduced then.

He said it "took a lot of effort and coordination" to plan the getaway.

He said prison officials and guards should not be blamed for a lack of security.

"I don't know what they were supposed to have done to counteract us," he said.

Mr. Rivas said the escapees spent their first night of freedom in San Antonio and then went to Houston before heading to North Texas.

He said that because many law-enforcement officials assumed that the escapees would head to Mexico, they went north instead.

Six of the inmates are awaiting extradition to Texas, where they face capital-murder charges in the shooting death of Officer Hawkins. The seventh inmate, Larry Harper, committed suicide Monday in Colorado as authorities closed in on the group.

Two of the inmates, Donald Newbury and Patrick Murphy Jr., have a hearing scheduled for Monday in Colorado Springs where they are expected to tell a judge whether they will fight extradition.

Mr. Rivas has said he will not fight extradition. He is expected to be returned to Dallas County soon to stand trial in Officer Hawkins' slaying.

An attorney for escapee Randy Halprin told a judge Friday that his client intends to fight extradition. Joseph C. Garcia's attorney has said she wants more time to explore his options before a decision is made whether he will fight extradition.

Another escapee, Michael Rodriguez, has said he will fight extradition and asked for more time to decide what to do. But his attorney said that position could change.

'I had no big plans'

During the Channel 8 interview Saturday, Mr. Rivas said that despite law-enforcement officials' allegations to the contrary, neither he nor the other men had any glorious post-escape plans.

"Honestly, I had no big plans," Mr. Rivas said. "I just wanted to be treated like a normal person and work like everybody else. I know it sounds very dull, but I learned to appreciate a lot more after being incarcerated for 7½ years."

Mr. Rivas acknowledged that the escape and subsequent capture had left him with some regrets.

"My best friend is dead and Mr. Hawkins is dead, and my friends are now in prison again," he said.